

Misconceptions About Withdrawal Of Fellowship – Part 2

INTRODUCTION:

1. It is important that we study the subject of *withdrawal* because there are misconceptions that people have that can easily “muddy the water.”
2. In our last lesson on this subject, we looked at how...
 - A. Some mistakenly believe withdrawal “kicks a person out of the church.”
 - i. In answer to this we saw how withdrawal is about withholding social interaction with the sinning brother to create shame and bring about their repentance, not about barring the door, and keeping them from worship, etc., which is the Catholic concept of excommunication.
 - B. Some believe wrongly withdrawal ends one’s fellowship with God.
 - i. This is wrong because withdrawal is an acknowledgement of the fact that this person is living in sin which has already separated them from fellowship with God.
 - ii. It is a choice by faithful brethren to allow this person that is living like a sinner to be given over to their sins and the world in hopes of them seeing what they have lost by their sin and repent.
3. Today I want to consider more misconceptions about withdrawal in hopes of...
 - A. Helping us to have a correct view of withdrawal and its purposes.
 - B. Helping us be prepared to act biblically and with conviction when there is need to withdraw for the spiritual good of the local church and the sinning member who is the focus of our actions.

BODY:

I. Misconception 3: Withdrawal is universal in scope.

- A. Many believe that once a brother is withdrawn from, that withdrawal is bound to be honored by the whole of the Lord’s church, whether individuals or local churches.
 1. You see this belief sometimes expressed in the form of a letter that is mailed out by the withdrawing congregation to churches in the area outlining the details of the withdrawal.
 2. It is believed by those who hold to this position that any church that would receive such a person is unfaithful or soft in their approach toward discipline and biblical authority.
- B. There are definite problems with this approach.
 1. While biblical fellowship does extend beyond the local level, *withdrawal of association* is, by its nature, local in application.
 - a. Fellowship goes beyond the local level:
 - i. Peter extended “fellowship” to Paul, who was not a member in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9).
 - ii. The church in Corinth had “fellowship” with Paul in his preaching in other places (Phil. 4:15).
 - b. Yet, *withdrawal* is basically local in its application.
 - i. These persons were “among” them and were to be “taken away from among you” and “purged out” of their close association (1 Cor. 5:2, 7).
 - ii. They were commanded to “not to keep company with” this person, “not even to eat with such a person,” that he may be ashamed (1 Cor. 5:9, 11; 2 Thess. 2:14)!
 - i) This has little bearing concerning someone who is somewhere else.
 - ii) It is difficult to truly say you are “not keeping company with” a person that you never see anyway!
 2. *Reception into fellowship* and *close association* is a local matter.
 - a. We are not to “receive” a false teacher, refusing to give any support for them and their error (2 John 9-11).
 - b. Any Christian seeking to join a local congregation must be examined properly before being accepted.
 - i. What they believe and teach must be considered; we cannot blindly accept them because they were accepted by another congregation.

- ii. And, if that person has been withdrawn from, wisdom demands that we carefully examination it in light of the individual and the evidence presented by the congregation that marked and withdrew from that individual.
- iii. Remember, congregations are fallible and can be wrong in withdrawal and fellowship.
- iv. To blindly accept any withdrawal is as foolish as to blindly ignore any withdrawal!

II. Misconception 4: Withdrawal for public sin has specific steps to be followed

- A. It is important to understand that I said “withdrawal for public sin,” seeing that I understand a private sin against a brother has a specific process outlined in scripture (Matt. 18:15-17).
 - 1. This involves a sin of one individual against another that no one else may know about.
 - 2. Thus, the process is specified to keep it private, if possible.
 - 3. If no repentance is forthcoming, then the congregation is notified, and the individual is rebuked by the church (15:17).
 - a. Yet, no specifics are given as to how the church is to address this.
 - b. In certain cases, this may even involve public rebuke in the assembly (1 Tim. 5:20).
 - c. Yet, all that is indicated is that this person is to “hear the church.”
- B. Too often I have seen people that feel they are not bound by the congregational withdrawal of a publicly sinning brother/sister because “it was not done right.”
 - 1. I say “publicly sinning,” because these brethren and their sin are known by the congregation as a whole, not being a private, personal sin.
 - 2. The “process,” if you will, leaves very much to the discretion of the local congregation.
 - a. We know it must be conducted without prejudice (1 Tim. 5:21).
 - b. We know that sinning brethren are to be:
 - i. Warned (1 Thess. 5:14).
 - ii. Exhorted (1 Tim. 5:1-2). Both are to be done with “longsuffering” (2 Tim. 4:2).
 - iii. If no repentance follows, there is to be a “marking” and a refusal to “keep company with” that individual, while admonishing him as a brother (cite 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15).
 - iv. This process involves a congregational decision made known to the local congregation (1 Cor. 5:4-5).
 - v. Yet, in all this we are left to our own judgment as to “how, how many, and how long” this whole process of warning and exhortation is to go.
 - vi. Finally, if the withdrawal brings repentance in the heart of the sinner and they return, we are to receive them with open arms, reaffirming our love for them (2 Cor. 2:6-8)
 - c. The closest thing to specific instruction we have is that a “divisive man” is to be rejected “after two admonitions” (Titus 3:10-11).

III. Misconception 5: Withdrawal is a negative action that should only be used as a last resort.

- A. Many view withdrawal as a very negative event that should be used only as a last resort.
 - 1. People will say, “If they are still coming, you shouldn’t withdraw,” or “If there is any hope of their repentance, you shouldn’t withdraw.”
 - a. Thus, withdrawal is seen as something you do after everything else has been tried—when there is basically little hope left.
 - b. It becomes, then, only a statement of rejection of the person and their lifestyle, often after they are “gone,” with little connection to the purity of the church.
 - 2. Yet, this approach totally misses the point of withdrawal and hamstring its effectiveness in most every way.
 - a. For, if we wait until the sinning party chooses to leave, then we have likely already compromised the purity of the congregation, seeing it was their decision to leave, not ours to purify the church.
 - b. Also, when we wait until they have chosen to leave, then our “not keeping company” with them is going to be far less effective because they don’t care...and it is basically their choice, not ours!

- B. Withdrawal is designed to *save souls*.
1. Withdrawal is basically designed to be directed, for the most part, toward those who are still attending (1 Cor. 5:1-2).
 2. It is designed to be imposed, not when there is no more hope, but so that the sinning child of God would be ashamed and repent so that their soul will be saved (1 Cor. 5:4-5).
 - a. Does this mean we “cannot withdraw our association from the withdrawn”?
 - b. No, because a person who stops attending doesn’t mean that our association is completely gone.
 - c. “Not keeping company” with them and our duties to admonish them must be fulfilled.
 3. And, brethren, when it is taken seriously by *everyone* in the local congregation, it can and will work (2 Cor. 2:5-10).
 - a. If anyone within the congregation ignores this duty, it will severely limit its effectiveness.
 - b. To ignore this duty can result in the eternal condemnation of the sinner, placing part of the blame upon those who ignore the command to withdraw.

CONCLUSION:

1. Let us be careful to understand the purpose of withdrawal—that it is to save souls, not destroy them.
2. Let us realize that we all have responsibilities in this matter to assure that God’s plan works.

1. erroneous because God’s grace is received as a gift by those in Christ (1 Cor. 1:4 – “I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus”).
 - a. The church cannot bar one who is “in Christ” from God’s grace.
 - i. God Himself bestows blessing directly to those who are “in Him,” or in Christ (Eph. 1:3). The local church cannot stop this!
 - ii. The church is a universal “group” of people that exists because they are *recipients* of the grace of God, not in order to bestow God’s grace (Acts 2:47).
 - iii. Thus, this whole concept of loss of salvation because of being “kicked out of the church” is fallacious.